



MONTANA CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

ADVOCACY AND RESOURCE CENTERS

485

FOR MONTANANS WITH DISABILITIES

LIFTT | MILP | NCILS | SUMMIT

February 16, 2011

RE: House Bill 485: funding for youth in transition public testimony

Dear Chairman McNutt and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

First, I would like to apologize that I am not able to be here in person today to testify in support of House Bill 485 that aims to provide funding for an important program that offers hands on, practical, and innovative services for youth with disabilities, their families, and the professionals that work with them through one of the most difficult period of their lives, the transition from high school into adult life.

Youth with disabilities often face unique challenges that their peers without disabilities do not when it comes to their high school experiences and how those experiences help prepare each student for adult life after school, whether they choose to continue their education or move on to seek employment. While in high school, youth with disabilities often times are put through a process of having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) where teachers, parents, and other authority figures surround the student to chart a course of action for how that student can succeed in school. More often than not, students either do not speak at their own IEP meetings or they simply do not attend leaving their teachers, parents, and other authority figures to determine what they think is best for the student and ensure that all of the support systems necessary for how they think that students should succeed, are in place.

This leaves the student with a disability at a disadvantage once they graduate high school and move on to live in the adult world. For one, once the student leaves high school they no longer have those teachers and other authority figures around them constantly making sure that that student has what they need to be successful. Once out of high school, that student is now responsible for making sure their own needs are met. If they choose to pursue further education at a college or university there are no teachers there to make sure that they have the appropriate accommodations and there are no more IEP's. The student is now responsible for requesting any accommodation that he or she may need. The same goes for employment. It is not an employer's responsibility to identify the employee that has a disability and ask whether or not they need any job accommodations; in fact, in most instances it is illegal for the employer to do so.

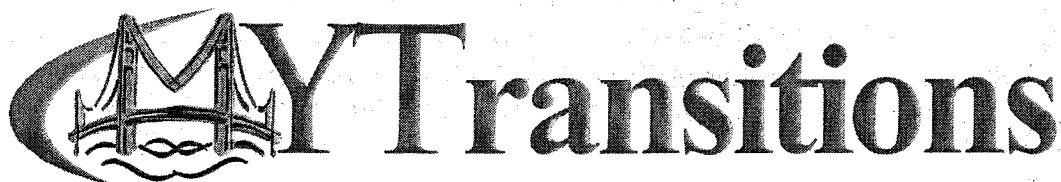
Not only is it important for youth with disabilities to learn the skills necessary to be able to manage their own lives once they enter the adult world, but it is also equally important for their families and the professionals and teachers who serve as the core elements in preparing youth to succeed to also learn methods on how to best prepare those youth by making sure they are involved in the entire process of their own transition.

These are but a few of the reasons why this program is so important for youth in transition and shows how even a little bit of money can go a long ways towards not only serving our Montana youth, but, more importantly, preparing our workforce and leaders of tomorrow.

As you can see from the fact sheet included with this testimony, the numbers for this program speak for themselves and I think that you would agree that this is a worthwhile program. This is a program that can accomplish significantly positive outcomes and reach out to a great number of youths with disabilities all across our vast state without using a significant amount of resources. We, the Montana Centers for Independent Living, hope that you find this small investment to better prepare Montana's youth with disabilities to enter the workforce and live active and successful adult lives worth it. We hope that you can support House Bill 485 and send the message that yes, a future of independence and success for Montana's youth with disabilities is not only in their own best interest, but in the best interest of all Montanans.

Respectfully,

Travis Hoffman, Lobbyist
Montana Centers for Independent Living
406-396-8159
thoffman@summitilc.org



Montana Youth Transitions Project

Our Mission

The Montana Youth Transitions Project is a partnership of Montana families, nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies devoted to improving the quality of life for youth with disabilities by creating a seamless system of support through the transition from high school to adult life.

Summary

There are over 6,700 youth with disabilities in Montana high schools. The drop-out rate of these young people is twice that of their peers. The partners of the Montana Youth Transitions Project want to create a regional and state strategy by which training and supports are created while a youth is still in school which will lead to successful outcomes after high school.

During the 2009 legislative session, \$50,000 a year for each year of the biennium was provided by the legislature. Those funds were received beginning July 1, 2009. The following information shows the significant impact that the project funded with those monies has had in the first 16 months.

Statistics

- **Annual Transitions Conference**

An annual conference addressing the issues surrounding transition has been a priority for the project. It provides a venue for families, professionals, and business to come together and discuss the issues. The planning committee for the conferences is comprised of stakeholders from both the public and private sector from across the state. The 2009 and 2010 conference saw an overall attendance of 265 individuals. In 2009 there were 11 youth with disabilities in attendance and in 2010 there were 23 youth with disabilities. Funding for the conference comes from sponsors and registration fees with the only expense being staff time to facilitate and coordinate the planning process.

- **MYT Transitions Web Site**

A second priority of the MYT Project is the creation of a comprehensive sustainable transition web site. The MYT Project web site is www.montanayouthtransitions.org. The MYT Project sought sponsors for the web site and for \$1,000 individuals or programs could become a sponsor for 5 years. With our current sponsors we have funding to maintain the site for 10 years. The web site has a steering committee comprised of partners from across the state and they meet by phone on a quarterly basis. The only cost related to the web site is staff time to conduct all administrative tasks.

related to a web site. The statistics show that in July 2009 show that the web site had 1,215 and 1,855 pages were viewed. By October 2010 there were 2,815 visits and 5,483 pages were viewed. This shows a significant increase of the impact that the web site is having for people across Montana needing to locate transition resources.

- **Regional Transition Groups**

The MYT Project acknowledges that there the resources and transition needs are varied across the state. To this end the Project has created regional Transition meetings that will bring together families, professions and businesses together regionally to address issues in their area. The meetings are modeled after regional groups that were created by OPI during the System Change Grant of the 1990's. The regional meetings began in May 2010 in five areas: Missoula/Kalispell, Helena/Butte/Bozeman, Great Falls, Billings, and Miles City. Each region meets as often as their need dictates. During the first six months of regional meetings there were 211 people in attendance from across the state. The cost related to this activity is travel, copying of agendas and minutes, and staff time to facilitate and administer these meetings.

- **Disability Mentoring Day**

The third Wednesday of October each year the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) coordinates a national effort of Disability Mentoring Day. This event provides job shadowing opportunities for youth with disabilities. A sociological showed that youth with disabilities were more likely to be successful after high school if they had the opportunity to job shadow while still in school. Disability Mentoring Day was held on October 20, 2010 in three cities in Montana and 52 youth with disabilities participated in job shadowing opportunities. A steering committee is being created to assist with the planning and implementation of Disability Mentoring Day 2011. The cost of this activity is staff time recruiting students to participate and locating businesses and professionals to provide job shadowing opportunities.

Conclusion

The Montana Youth Transitions Project has created a model where partners in the public and private sector come together and pool their staff time and agency resources to create systemic solutions to the issue of transition. This model through coordination of efforts and seeking financial partners have created a cost effective approach to an issue to potentially can affect 6,700+ youth and their families in Montana. We have shown in 16 months the impact that creating public and private partnerships can have on this issue and hope that Montana will continue to provide funding to this effort.